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A/AC.172/1996/CRP.3
8 August 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES
Substantive session
19-23 August 1996
Agenda item 2 (b) (iv)

CALENDAR OF CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS: COST ACCOUNTING SYSTEM FOR CONFERENCE SERVICES

Note by the Secretariat

1. In the comprehensive study on conference services carried out in 1994 at the request of the General Assembly (A/C.5/49/34), the availability of better cost information on meetings and documentation was identified as a requirement for more effective management of conference-servicing resources. The study concluded that more accurate information on the cost of different modes of work and different workflows, and on the effects of the addition or removal of work, was needed to give a more complete picture of the total costs involved, to improve budgeting for conference services and to identify opportunities to reduce costs by eliminating work or removing work from conference-servicing processes. As suggested by the Committee on Conferences in its report on its 1994 substantive session, the final report on the comprehensive study recommended that a cost-accounting system be developed to provide better information on the real costs of conference servicing.

2. Later that year the General Assembly, in its resolution 49/221 C of 23 December 1994, endorsed the findings and conclusions of the comprehensive study and, inter alia, requested the Secretary-General, in the context of the proposed programme budget for 1996-1997, to include better cost information on meetings and documentation. The Committee on Conferences returned to the matter in 1995, when it requested the Secretariat to develop as soon as possible a cost-accounting system for conference services. The General Assembly incorporated the Committee's position in its resolution 50/206 D of 23 December 1995, in which it requested the Secretary-General to develop as soon as possible a comprehensive and accurate cost-accounting system for conference services.

3. Over the past 18 months, separate cost-analysis exercises have been undertaken or are being planned in various conference-servicing areas. Specifically, in connection with external and internal audits, cost comparisons have been made for different translation modalities: by in-house staff, by local and non-local temporary staff and by contractors. In the context of the current efficiency review, the cost of temporary assistance for various language and non-language functions has been analysed, and the cost of processing documentation outside regular working hours has been calculated more accurately. In compliance with section III of General Assembly resolution 49/237 of 31 March 1995, a comparative analysis of the use of internal and external facilities to meet the printing requirements of the Organization at New York and Geneva has been planned; the terms of reference for this study have been developed and external experts have been identified to carry it out. In addition, the notional costs of conference services, by unit of output, have been updated and publicized in relation with the active dialogue Conference Services has been maintaining with committee secretariats as directed by the Committee on Conferences.

4. However, progress in the development of a comprehensive cost-accounting system for conference services has unfortunately been slow. At the time the recommendations of the study of conference services were endorsed by the General Assembly, it had been intended to entrust the task of developing the system to a specialized external consultant. This course of action was initially precluded by the measures adopted in 1995 to address the financial situation, which required the suspension of all immediate cash expenditures. Alternative sources of financing for external consultant services are being investigated.

5. An audit of selected conference-servicing operations by the Panel of External Auditors in late 1995 afforded another opportunity to try to make progress on this issue. The external auditors were requested to develop guidelines for more accurate cost accounting in conference services. Time constraints and the demands of the regular audit only allowed the auditors to engage in a simplified ex post facto calculation of conference-servicing unit costs, based on actual expenditure and output over an earlier period. This kind of exercise had already been carried out by Conference Services in connection with the preparation of the synoptic table by sector of meetings held in 1992-1993 and 1994-1995, requested by the Committee on Conferences in 1994 and considered by it in 1995. Although useful to show how costs are distributed among United Nations organs or groups of organs, and among conference-servicing functions, it was not considered accurate or detailed enough to address the needs identified in the comprehensive study.

6. Early in 1996, in the context of the efficiency review being carried out throughout the Organization, Conference Services approached the secretariat of the Efficiency Board to seek assistance for the development of the recommended cost-accounting system. As a result, Conference Services managers have been in contact with experts in public-sector reform provided by Member States and discussions have begun on ways to address the issue, including the possible use of a full or partial quota and chargeback system for conference-servicing costs.

7. On the other hand, more detailed calculations of conference-servicing costs have been undertaken at other United Nations offices, and in specialized

agencies of the United Nations system, in connection with current or proposed charge-back or cost-sharing schemes. In the United Nations Office at Vienna, the Organization provides interpretation services to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and documentation services to UNIDO, and is reimbursed for them by those agencies. A variety of costing techniques are used for different functions.

8. At the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON), consideration is being given to the possibility of shifting the budgeting of conference services to a "self-financing" basis, that is, to a system under which their costs would be covered by payments made by users of the services. Fees for conference services would be set for cost recovery, or made to match market prices, thus ensuring that they remain competitive. In related studies, UNON has calculated the costs of its services using a meeting-day as unit for meeting servicing (including interpretation) and a 330-word page for documentation. Again, the calculations were based on actual expenditures in 1995 divided by total number of output units.

9. At the 1996 Inter-Agency Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications, held at Geneva in June, the use of quota or charge-back systems to cover conference-servicing costs was an item on the agenda. Two specialized agencies - the World Bank and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) - reported on their experience with such systems.

10. At the World Bank, all services are charged to user units except interpretation for executive and legislative bodies. User units are given dollar budgets (instead of posts and other resources) and can decide what resources they will devote to conference services and to other items. They are also free to purchase conference services directly on the market, thus forcing the Bank's internal services to compete in terms of rates and of quality. UNESCO employs a quota system for its document-processing operations which covers all the material it produces except documentation for its meetings and conferences. Author units are assigned page quotas based on their work plans and discussed with the processing services. Any material in excess of the quota can be processed by the documentation services subject to payment of a unit fee, or can be processed externally at the unit's expense.

11. Conference Services is hopeful that, either with or without the assistance of external accounting specialists, more accurate cost information on conference-servicing functions will be developed by making use of the help of the Efficiency Board secretariat and the studies carried out at other offices and agencies.

A/AC.172/1996/CRP.4
26 July 1996

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COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES
Substantive session of 1996
19-23 August 1996
Agenda item 2 (c)

CALENDAR OF CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS: REQUESTS FOR EXCEPTIONS TO SECTION I, PARAGRAPH 7, OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 40/243

Note by the Secretariat

1. In section I, paragraph 7, of its resolution 40/243 of 18 December 1985, the General Assembly decided that "no subsidiary organ of the General Assembly may meet at United Nations Headquarters during a regular session of the Assembly unless explicitly authorized by the Assembly".

2. Every year, a certain number of requests for exceptions to that rule are received. In accordance with established practice, the requests are first submitted to the Committee on Conferences, which then makes a recommendation to the General Assembly for the required authorization.

3. At its 1986 session, the Committee on Conferences reviewed the procedure by which it dealt with such requests and decided that in future the following procedure should be adopted: 1/

(a) Subsidiary organs of the General Assembly wishing to request explicit authorization from the Assembly to meet at Headquarters during the session should write to the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences, except for unforeseen circumstances, before the substantive session of the Committee; the letter should be circulated to all members of the Committee, together with appropriate servicing information provided by the Secretariat;

(b) The request should contain the reason or reasons why the authorization is being requested and/or the reason or reasons why the organ concerned did not finish its work during the time allotted to it and in compliance with the 1 September deadline for the completion of reports of subsidiary organs of the Assembly laid down in Assembly resolution 40/243, section I, paragraph 6;

(c) The request should also explain why it is necessary to meet during the Assembly and should specify, to the extent possible, the number of meetings that would be required;

(d) In the event that approval is forthcoming, all such meetings would be allocated conference services on an "as available" basis from within existing resources in such a way that the work of the General Assembly and its Main Committees is not impeded.

4. The annex to the present document contains requests received to date from subsidiary organs of the General Assembly to meet at Headquarters during the fifty-first session of the Assembly, as well as the relevant statistical information.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 32 (A/41/32), para. 64.

Annex

I. REQUESTS FOR MEETINGS DURING THE FIFTY-FIRST SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

A. Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the General Assembly for the Mid-term Review of the Implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s

Letter from the Principal Economic Affairs Officer, Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries

[Original: English]

[5 July 1996]

I would like to bring to your attention that the recently held organizational session of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the General Assembly decided, inter alia, to conduct the mid-term review starting on 16 September 1996. As the fifty-first session of the General Assembly will be inaugurated in the afternoon of 17 September 1996, the organizational session decided to recommend to the Assembly at its fiftieth session that the mandate of the Ad Hoc Committee be extended for the period set out in paragraph 6 of Assembly resolution 50/160 for the conduct of the mid-term review.

I would also like to recall the interoffice memorandum of Mr. Fernando Varela, Chairman of the Committee on Conferences, dated 11 December 1995, in which he announced that he would convey to the President of the General Assembly that the Committee on Conferences had recommended to the Assembly that an exception be granted to section I, paragraph 7, of resolution 40/243, authorizing the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole to meet in New York for the period indicated in resolution 50/160 of the General Assembly.

Furthermore, I would like to inform you of the decision of the organizational session to grant maximum participation to non-governmental organizations in the mid-term review in conformity with established rules and accepted practices, and in concurrence with the above-mentioned resolution 50/160.

I would like, therefore, to request that the necessary arrangements be made to have the following conference rooms booked from 16 September until and including 23 September 1996, with the exception of the afternoon of 17 September 1996: one conference room for the plenary with full interpretation facilities in six languages; and two conference rooms for the two working groups with interpretation only in three languages (English, French and Spanish) for the entire duration. In addition, one of the alphabet rooms would be needed for five working days (16 to 22 September 1996) for the use of non-governmental organizations.

B. Committee on Relations with the Host Country

Letter from the Chairman

[Original: English]

[6 June 1996]

As in previous years, a request that the Committee on Relations with the Host Country be permitted to meet during the fifty-first session of the General Assembly is herewith submitted.

This request is based on the Committee's mandate set out in General Assembly resolution 2819 (XXVI) of 15 December 1971 authorizing the Committee to meet periodically during the year or whenever the need arises. The Committee, since its establishment in 1971, has always met during the regular sessions of the General Assembly in order to consider, among other things, problems experienced by certain delegations in acquiring the necessary United States entry visas to attend the session, to finalize its annual report and to present it to the General Assembly.

Pursuant to its resolution 50/49 of 11 December 1995, the General Assembly requested the Committee to continue its work in conformity with Assembly resolution 2819 (XXVI) and to submit a report on its work to the Assembly at its fifty-first session (item 152 of the preliminary list). Having due regard to the nature of the Committee, its work, and previous experiences, it would suffice to make the necessary conference facilities available for two or three meetings only.

C. Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

Letter from the Chairman

[Original: English]

[26 June 1996]

I have the honour to inform you that the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People will again need authorization to hold meetings during the forthcoming session of the General Assembly in order to carry out its mandate.

As you are no doubt aware, the General Assembly, in its resolution 50/84 A of 15 December 1995, requested the Committee to continue to keep under review the situation relating to the question of Palestine and to report and make suggestions to the General Assembly or the Security Council, as appropriate.

As the Committee has no control over the timing of the events that it is called upon to discuss, it needs to meet throughout the year as circumstances dictate. On the basis of past experience, it is envisaged that the Committee

would require facilities for approximately six meetings during the General Assembly session. These would be in addition to the meeting to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which is already included in the approved calendar for 1996.

It would be highly appreciated if the Committee on Conferences would agree to recommend to the General Assembly that it authorize the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to meet during the fifty-first session of the Assembly.

D. Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Letter from the Secretary of the Working Group

[Original: English]

[12 July 1996]

In resolution 50/28 B, adopted by the General Assembly at its fiftieth session, on the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the Assembly requested that the Working Group continue its efforts, in cooperation with the Secretary-General and the Commissioner-General, for the financing of the Agency for a further period of one year.

In order to meet that request, the Working Group needs the latest data with regard to the UNRWA budget, i.e., up-to-date information on the current budget and precise indications as to the revenue required and the anticipated contributions for the next fiscal year. UNRWA has not been in a position to supply the Working Group with this timely information any earlier than September 1996, and the Working Group cannot prepare its report to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session without this important material.

In view of the obligation of the Working Group to submit its up-to-date report not later than the first half of October for consideration by the Special Political and Decolonization Committee and the General Assembly, little time is available for the few meetings of the Working Group and for the preparation of its report.

It would be very much appreciated if you could draw to the attention of the Committee on Conferences the request of the Working Group that it be authorized to meet during the first weeks of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly.

E. Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund

Letter from the Assistant Secretary of the Executive Board

[Original: English]

[12 July 1996]

As was the case last year, we are facing a dilemma with regard to the timing of the third regular session of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and a partial overlap with the fifty-first session of the United Nations General Assembly. The Executive Board has made it clear that it cannot meet in parallel with the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council (24 June-26 July), the third regular session of the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme and of the United Nations Population Fund (9-13 September) and the General Assembly of the United Nations after 20 September.

On an informal basis, we have been given to understand that the Secretariat could provide full services during the week of 16 to 19 September 1996, subject to the granting of special permission from the General Assembly.

Accordingly, we very much hope that the Committee on Conferences will give favourable consideration to our request to hold the third regular session of the UNICEF Executive Board from 16 to 19 September 1996, with the understanding that no meetings would be held on the afternoon of the opening of the General Assembly, 17 September 1996.

II. STATISTICAL INFORMATION

The following statistics refer to meetings with interpretation held during the fiftieth session of the General Assembly by the bodies listed above. The number of meetings planned by subsidiary organs during the regular session is not included because such meetings are approved only on an ad hoc basis and on the understanding that services are provided only as and when they are not required for meetings of the Assembly and its Main Committees.

	Number of meetings held	Hours and minutes lost		Total hours and minutes lost
		Late starting	Early ending	
Committee on Relations with the Host Country	2	0.40	2.55	3.35
Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People	3	1.30	3.30	5.00
Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East	1 a/	-	-	-
Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund	8	2.20	3.10	5.30
Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the General Assembly for the Mid-term Review of the Implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s	-	-	-	-

a/ No conference services provided.

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8 August 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES
1996 substantive session
19-23 August 1996
Agenda item 3

CONTROL AND LIMITATION OF DOCUMENTATION

State of preparation of the documents required for the substantive session of the Committee on Conferences

Note by the Secretariat

1. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 46/190 of 20 December 1991, the present document contains a report on the exact state of preparation of all the documents in all languages requested by the Committee on Conferences at its organizational session on 1 February 1996 for submission during its substantive session in August 1996. A listing of those documents and their current status is shown overleaf. A total of 11 documents will have been issued for the Committee's substantive session of 1996.

Symbol	Subject	Status
A/AC.172/1996/L.1	Annotated provisional agenda for the 1996 organizational session	Issued
A/AC.172/1996/1	Agenda and programme of work for 1996	Issued
A/AC.172/1996/2	Calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 1996-1997	Issued
A/AC.172/1996/3	Meeting statistics of United Nations organs	To be issued 12 August 1996
A/AC.172/1996/INF/1	Membership of the Committee	Issued
A/AC.172/1996/CRP.1	Medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001: subprogramme on conference services	Issued
A/AC.172/1996/CRP.2	Draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 1997	Issued
A/AC.172/1996/CRP.3	Cost-accounting system for conference services	To be issued
A/AC.172/1996/CRP.4	Requests for exceptions to section I, paragraph 7, of General Assembly resolution 40/243	Issued
A/51/253	Measures to enhance utilization of conference services	Issued
A/51/268	Implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/206 C	To be issued 10 August 1996